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Environmental Assessment

Small Timber Sales; Big Bear, Dry Stream, Low Ridge, and Foggy Tree

Hoonah Ranger District, Tongass National Forest
Hoonah, Alaska

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INTRODUCTION

Document Structure

The Forest Service has prepared this Environmental Assessment in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant federal and state laws and regulations. This Environmental Assessment discloses the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts that would result from the proposed action and alternatives. The document is organized into four parts:

- *Introduction:* This section includes information on the history of the project proposal, the purpose and need for the project, and the agency's proposal for achieving that purpose and need. This section also details how the Forest Service informed the public of the proposal and how the public responded.
- *Alternatives, including the Proposed Action:* This section provides a more detailed description of the agency's proposed action as well as alternative methods for achieving the stated purpose. Any alternatives were developed based on significant issues raised by the public and other agencies. This section also includes possible mitigation measures. Finally, this section provides a summary table of the environmental consequences associated with each alternative.
- *Environmental Consequences*: This section describes the environmental effects of implementing the proposed action and any other alternatives. This analysis is organized by resource area. Within each section, the affected environment is described first, followed by the effects of the No Action Alternative that provides a baseline for evaluation and comparison of any other alternatives that follow.
- *Agencies and Persons Consulted:* This section provides a list of preparers and agencies consulted during the development of the environmental assessment.
- *Appendices*: The appendices provide more detailed information to support the analyses presented in the environmental assessment.

Additional documentation, including more detailed analyses of project-area resources, may be found in the project planning record located at the Hoonah Ranger District Office in Hoonah, Alaska.

Background

The Hoonah Ranger District is proposing to harvest an estimated 750 thousand board feet of timber in four small sales. Each of the proposed timber sales will consist of a harvest unit of about 30 acres in size with an estimated 250 thousand board feet. The proposed timber sales are located on north Chichagof Island, about 60 air miles north of Sitka, Alaska. The project areas are located in T 46S, R 64E, Section 19 & 30 (Big Bear Timber Sale), T 45S, R 62E, Section 18 (Dry Stream Timber Sale), T 45S, R 64E, Section 8 (Low Ridge Timber Sale), T 45S, R 62E, Section 6 (Foggy Tree Timber Sale).

The trees along the district road system are either over mature, starting to die or are dense with little or no understory vegetation. Between fifteen to fifty percent of the trees, in the project area, are dead and dying. Less than forty-five percent of the trees will be harvested in any of the units. This will leave the remaining trees in an uneven-aged stand, with small openings to allow sunlight to penetrate to the forest floor.

Purpose & Need for Action

The purpose and need for the project is to implement the direction, goals, and objectives in the Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan as Revised (TLMPR). The objectives of the timber sales are to manage the timber resources, promote forest health, and provide an opportunity for small logging companies and sawmills.

The project areas are in Value Comparison Unit (VCU) 204, 218, and 209 and located completely within in the Timber Production Land Use Designation (LUD). The unit in VCU 218 is near the Modified Landscape LUD.

Forest wide goals and objectives for the project area can be found in the Forest Plan Chapters 2 and 4. Applicable goals and objectives include:

- Manage the timber resource for production of saw timber and other wood products from suitable timber harvest, on an even aged flow, long term sustained yield basis and in an economically efficient manner.

- Provide a diversity of opportunities for resource uses that contribute to the local and regional economies of Southeast Alaska.

- Support a wide range of natural resource employment opportunities within Southeast Alaska's communities.

- Seek to provide a timber supply sufficient to meet the annual market demand for Tongass National Forest timber, which will support local small businesses.

This project is specifically designed to provide a source of timber to small local sawmills. This action is needed to help meet an increasing demand for timber sales that can be carried out by small local timber purchasers.

Proposed Action

The action proposed by the Forest Service to meet the purpose and needs described above is to selectively harvest about 30 acres in each of the four areas. The timber is to be harvested using a shovel and cable yarding systems.

Each area will harvest a different percentage of timber depending on the stand characteristics. Less than forty-five percent of the stand would be individually selected for harvest. No trees will be harvested from stream buffers, and no clearcutting or road construction will occur.

Decision Framework

Given the purpose and need, the deciding official will decide:

- Whether or not to harvest timber in these project areas, based on resource effects.
- Whether or not additional mitigation and monitoring requirements are necessary to limit adverse environmental effects.

Public Involvement

The proposal was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions on January 2003. The proposal was provided to the public, Alaska Native groups, municipal offices, special interest groups, and other agencies for comment during scoping March 28, 2003. In addition, as part of the public involvement process, the agency placed a public notice in the Juneau Empire on March 28, 2003. No comments to scoping were received.

Issues

Issues in the context of this analysis are concerns, disputes or disagreement concerning the effects of implementing the Proposed Action. Significant issues are those directly or indirectly caused by implementing the proposed action and are addressed in the analysis by considering alternatives to the Proposed Action or mitigation to reduce or eliminate the effect. Non-significant issues generally do not result in the formulation of alternatives to the Proposed Action but may be addressed when considering the environmental effects of each alternative. Non-significant issues may not be discussed in detail if they are: 1) outside the scope of the proposed action; 2) already decided by law, regulation, Forest Plan, or other higher level decision; 3) irrelevant to the decision to be made; or 4) conjectural and not supported by scientific or factual evidence. The Council for Environmental Quality (CEQ) NEPA regulations require this delineation in Sec. 1501.7, "...identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues which are not significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review (Sec. 1506.3)".

No significant or non-significant issues were identified.

COMPARISON OF ALTERNATIVES, INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

This section describes and compares the alternatives considered for the Small Timber Sales project. The absence of significant issues eliminated the need to develop alternatives to the Proposed Action and No Action alternative. This section also presents the proposed action and no action in comparative form, sharply defining, the difference between each alternative and providing a clear basis for choice by the decision maker and the public. Some of the information used to compare the alternatives is based upon the environmental, social and economic effects of implementing each alternative.

Alternatives

Alternative 1

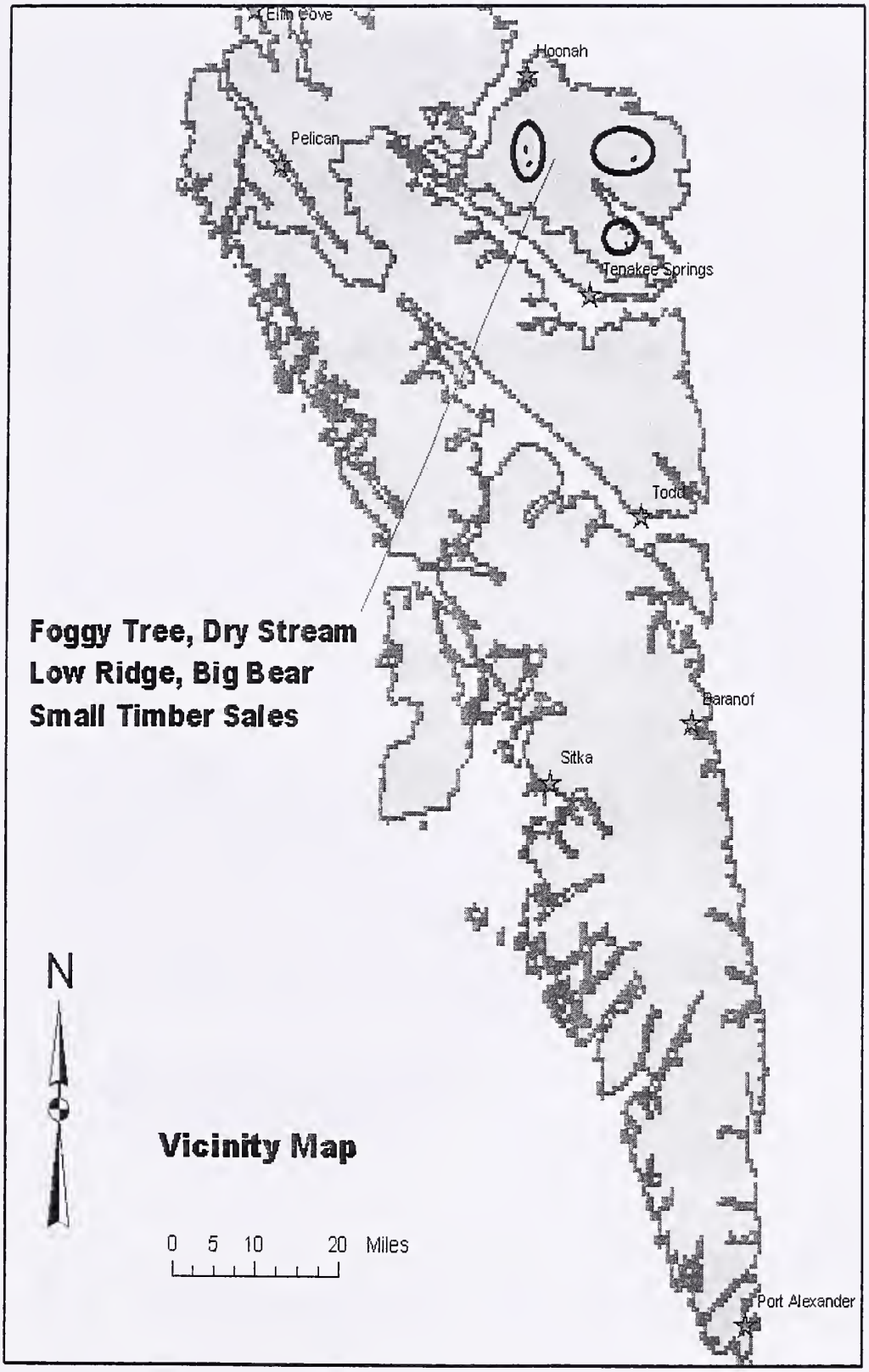
No Action

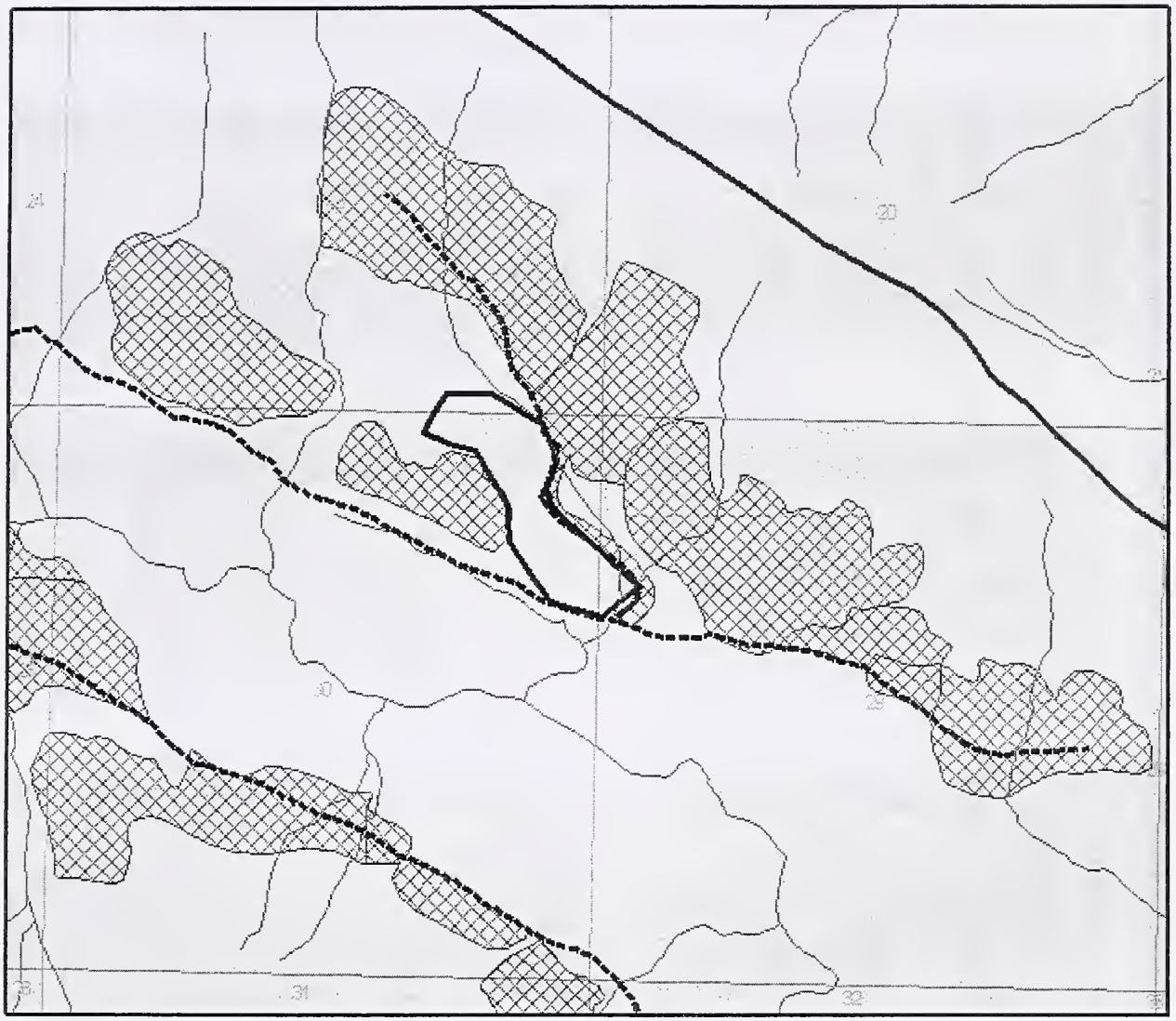
Under the No Action alternative, current management plans would continue to guide management of the project area. No timber harvest activities would be implemented at this time. It does not preclude timber harvest from other areas or from the project area at some time in the future and does not preclude existing management activities or permitted uses from occurring within the project area. The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 CFR 1502.14d) requires that a no action alternative be analyzed in every EA.

Alternative 2

The Proposed Action

This alternative proposes to commercially harvest four timber sale areas at 30 acres each, to promote forest health, maintain a multi-aged timber stand, and supply timber for local sawmills. Less than forty-five percent of the timber will be selectively harvested from any of the areas. An estimated 200 thousand board feet of timber will be harvested from each area. No trees within established stream buffers will be harvested, no clearcutting would occur and no new roads would be constructed.


Elfin Cove
Hoonah
Pelican
Tenakee Springs
Todd
Foggy Tree, Dry Stream
Low Ridge, Big Bear
Small Timber Sales
Baranof
Sitka
N
Vicinity Map
0 5 10 20 Miles
Port Alexander



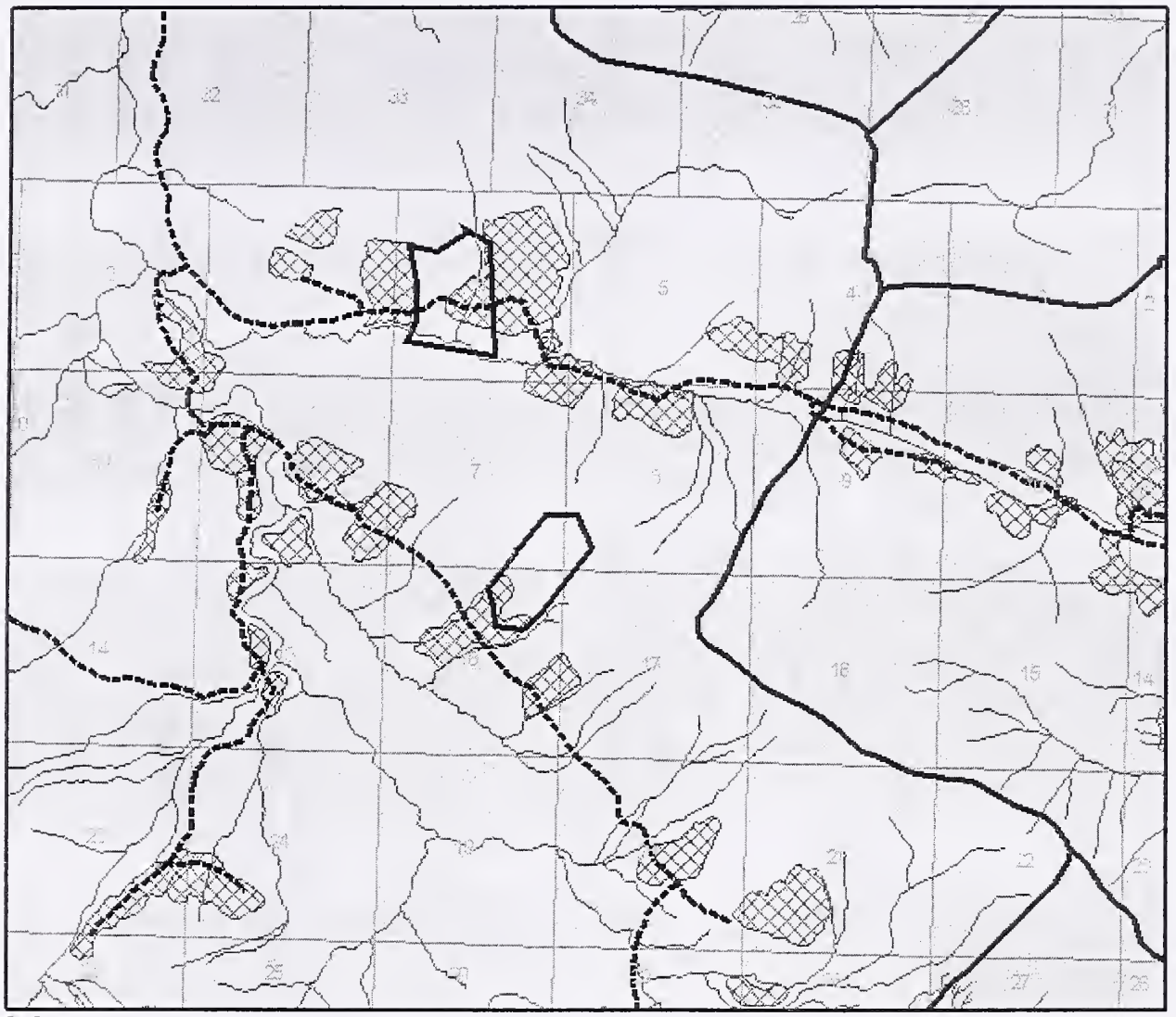
N

Big Bear Small Timber Sale
T45S R64E Section 19

0 0.15 0.3 0.6 Miles

Legend

- VCU
- Roads
- Streams
- Previous Harvest
- Proposed Sale Area



N

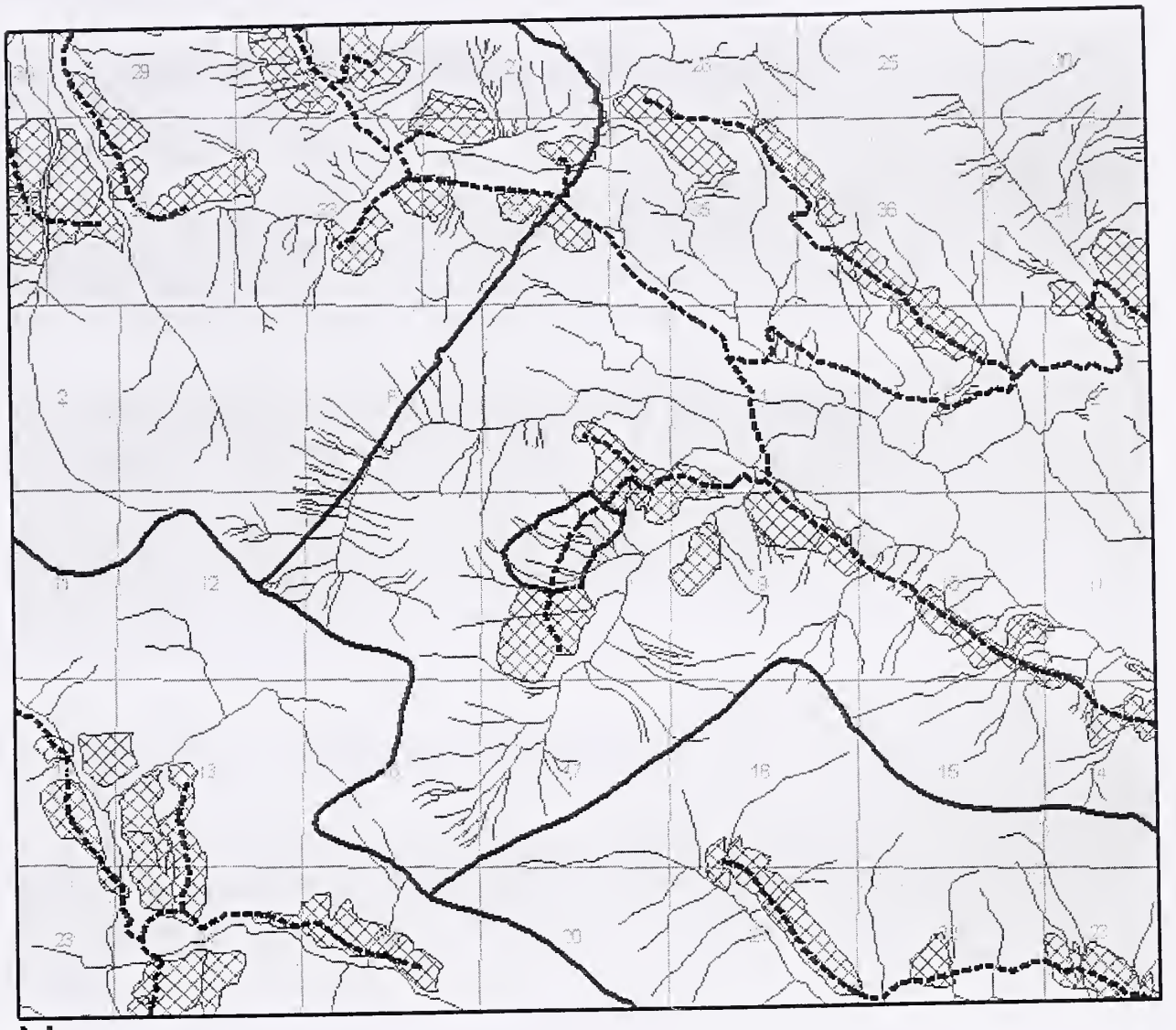
Foggy Tree Small Timber Sale
T45S R62E Section 6

Dry Stream Small Timber Sale
T45S R62E Section 18

0 0.5 1 2 Miles

Legend

- VCU
- Roads
- Streams
- Previous Harvest
- Proposed Sale Area



N

Low Ridge Small Timber Sale
T45S R64E Section 8

0 0.5 1 2 Miles

Legend

- VCU
- Roads
- Streams
- Previous Harvest
- Proposed Sale Area

Mitigation Measures Common to Both Alternatives

Mitigation measures were developed to address some of the potential impacts associated with the action alternatives or as Forest Plan direction in the form of Forest wide Standards and guidelines. Chapter 4 of the Forest Plan contains detailed description of the forest wide standards and guidelines.

Riparian Management Areas- No timber harvest is proposed within Riparian Management Areas in accordance with Forest Plan standards and guidelines for Class I, and II streams. Foggy Tree has several Class I/II streams on the lower portion of the unit. Low Ridge has one Class III stream that will be protected by falling and yarding away from the stream.

Sensitive, Threatened, or Endangered Species- The Forest Plan contains standards and guidelines for each designated sensitive, threatened or endangered species. A Biological Evaluation and Assessment has been completed for all species potentially habiting the project area.

Sensitive Plants- No sensitive plants have been found although a rare forb, *Galium kamchatikum,* was located in the Low Ridge area in an old natural slide tract. The area will be buffered and no falling or yarding will commence in this area.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This section summarizes the physical, biological, social and economic environments of the affected project areas and the potential changes to those environments due to implementation of the alternatives.

Fish Habitat

Harvest activities are proposed to occur along existing roads open to motorized use. Low Ridge has a Class III stream in the area and Foggy Tree has a Class II stream in its border. Best Management Practices (BMP's) will be utilized to protect fish habitat and minimize soil disturbance.

Alternative 1 (No Action): Under the no action alternative no timber would be harvested within the project area. There would be no impact on essential fish habitat (EFH) under this alternative. The no action alternative describes the existing condition against which the proposed action is compared.

Foggy Tree has several streams that have been classified as Class II streams. A fisheries technician set up traps and caught fish in all the streams. This unit will be left in the No Action Alternative.

Alternative 2 (Proposed Action): It is anticipated that no adverse effect on essential fish habitat or managed fish species due to implementation of the proposed action. It is determined this project will have no effect for the following reasons: No new roads will be constructed, harvest activities will be low impact resulting in minor soil disturbance, and streams would be buffered. Implementing standards and guidelines from the Forest Plan and applicable Best Management Practices (BMP's) will be utilized to protect fish habitat.

Economics

Timber demand varies from year to year in Southeast Alaska. This is due to a variety of factors: interest rates, housing markets, timber availability, logging costs, and regional and world markets.

Alternative 1 (No Action): The No Action alternative would harvest no timber. There would be no contribution of wood products to the local timber industry. Revenues generated by employment would not be spent in the local community.

Alternative 2 (Proposed Action): Small timber sales would provide lower capital investment opportunities suitable for the small businesses common in Southeast Alaska's timber industry. This alternative would help meet local demand for small timber opportunities.

The district sold a similar sale this past year. These sales will be offered at base rates and bid up an average of $45.00/CCF. Based on current demand it is anticipated that these small sale(s) offerings will sell.

Heritage Resources

According to the National Historic Preservation Act, the Forest Service will locate, inventory, and evaluate all cultural sites that may be directly or indirectly affected by the proposed projects. Considering the elevation and distance to salt water, it is unlikely that any heritage resources would be impacted. Under the terms of the programmatic agreement with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the Alaska State Historic Preservation Officer, timber harvest within previously disturbed areas is a class of undertakings generally excluded from a case by case review.

A qualified heritage resource specialist has reviewed the proposed activities and determined that no sites eligible for or listed on the National Register of Historic Places will be affected. This has been documented in a Heritage Resource Report.

Karst

No Karst or cave resources occur in this area. This has been documented in a Karst & Cave Evaluation Report, which can be found in the project file.

Management Indicator Species

Management Indicator Species (MIS) are species whose response to land management activities can be used to help predict the likely response of other species with similar habitat requirements. Some of the MIS are associated with several habitat types; all are associated with spruce and hemlock forest of Southeast Alaska. There are 13 MIS that the Forest Plan has identified. Of those, the black bear, gray wolf, and the mountain goat do not occur in this area, and are not considered in this analysis.

Alternative 1 (No Action): With the No Action alternative, there would be no impact to any Management Indicator Species.

Alternative 2 (Proposed Action): There are ten MIS that may be found in the project area. Those include: the bald eagle, brown bear, brown creeper, hairy woodpecker, marten, red-breasted sapsucker, red squirrel, river otter, sitka black-tailed deer, and vancouver canada goose.

Bald eagle nesting habitat is primarily old-growth trees along the coast and within riparian areas. No bald eagle nests have been identified in the project area and activities will occur along existing roads and not in coastal areas. It has been determined that there will be no effects to bald eagles or their habitat from this alternative.

Brown bear critical or limiting period has been identified as late summer season. They may concentrate along low-elevation valley bottoms and streams. Because there will be no new road construction and less than forty-five percent of the stand will be harvested, low-elevation valley bottoms and streams would not be affected by the proposed action. Canopy cover along roads and travel corridors will be maintained. It has been determined that there will be no effects to brown bear or their habitat.

The brown creeper is considered an uncommon, permanent resident throughout Southeast Alaska. It is associated with high volume old growth, large trees. Riparian old growth and several high volume trees would be retained. It has been determined that there will be no effect to the brown creeper or its habitat.

The hairy woodpecker is also an uncommon, permanent resident of Southeast Alaska that uses old growth forest habitats with snags and partially dead trees for foraging and nesting. Riparian old growth and several high volume trees would be retained. Dead standing trees will not be removed unless it poses a significant safety concern. It has been determined that there will be no effect to the hairy woodpecker or their habitat.

Marten were transplanted to Chichagof Island between 1930 and 1950. The most limiting factor for marten is the quality and quantity of low elevation old growth forest habitat during the winter season. Riparian old growth and several high volume trees would be retained. Canopy cover along roads will be maintained since only forty-five percent of the stand would be harvested. It has been determined that there will be no effects to marten or their habitat.

Red-breasted sapsuckers are summer residents, which use old growth forest habitats with snags. Dead standing trees will not be removed unless it poses a significant safety concern. Riparian old growth and several high volume trees would be retained. It has been determined that there will be no effects to red-breasted sapsucker and their habitat.

The red squirrel was introduced to Chichagof Island in the early 1930's. They require forest with cone-producing trees and cavities in trees and snags. Because there will be a selective harvest of less than forty-five percent of the stand, and no new road construction, cone producing trees will be maintained. It has been determined that there will be no effects to red squirrels or their habitats.

River otters are associated with coastal and fresh water aquatic environments. Old growth forests have the highest habitat value, providing canopy cover. Proposed activities will not occur in their habitat.

Sitka black-tailed deer are found throughout Southeast Alaska. The most limiting factor is the quality and quantity of lower elevation old growth winter habitat. Low- elevation forest habitat will not be affected by the proposed action. Less than forty-five percent of the trees would be harvested. Riparian old growth and several high volume trees would be retained. It has been determined that there will be no effects to sitka black-tailed deer or their habitat.

Vancouver Canada Goose is found throughout Southeast Alaska in wetlands, estuary, and riparian areas of the forest. Proposed activities will not occur in their habitat.

There would be no direct or indirect effects to any MIS located within the Project Area. Canopy cover along riparian areas and roads would not be largely reduced. Between fifteen and forty-five percent of the trees would be individually selected and harvested. No trees would be removed from established stream buffers and old growth high volume trees would be retained.

Recreation

Recreation opportunities in the project area include viewing scenery and wildlife, gathering, hiking, fishing and hunting. There are no authorized special use permits for the project areas. The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) is used to identify recreation opportunities that may be affected by the various activities. The Roaded Modified is defined by remoteness from urban conditions and a low concentration of human sights and sounds in a visually disturbed backcountry setting. All forms of access and travel modes may occur.

Alternative 1 (No Action): No harvest of timber would occur. There would be no effect to recreational activities and resources.

Alternative 2 (Proposed Action): The proposed action will have no site specific prolonged direct effects to recreation. There would be no new road construction. Activities associated with the proposed action would occur using the existing road system. Noise from chainsaws and other equipment will be short in duration. The road could be blocked for up to 15 minutes at a time.

The proposed action will not change the existing ROS roaded modified. The ROS roaded modified is an acceptable recreation experience under the land management prescriptions in the area.

Sensitive Plants

There is only one plant that is federally listed or proposed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Alaska, *Polystichum aleticum* C. Christesen, which is endangered. It is only known to be found on Adak Island and is not expected to occur in the project area. A level five study was conducted at the proper time of year and is documented in a Biological Evaluation. If any undiscovered sensitive plant is encountered work will be halted until a botanist is consulted and measures are enacted.

Soils

Soil productivity, in terms of tree growth, is high on well-drained soils and decreases as latitude and elevation increase, where drainage is poor. Management activities have a potential to affect soil erosion.

Alternative 1 (No Action): No ground disturbing activities will occur. There would be no effect to soils.

Alternative 2 (Proposed Action): The slopes do not exceed twenty-five percent so the risk of mass failures, erosion, or wasting is low.

Subsistence

Subsistence is a major focus of life for many in Southeast Alaska. Hunting, fishing, trapping, and gathering activities are all important subsistence activities of this area. These activities occur mainly late summer through late fall.

Alternative 1 (No Action): No timber harvest will occur under this alternative so no changes to the current use patterns, accessibility or availability of subsistence resources will occur.

Alternative 2 (Proposed Action): By opening the overstory canopy and allowing sun light to reach the forest floor, berry producing and other forage plants should increase. This

project will selectively remove between fifteen and forty-five percent of the timber, while leaving corridors for wildlife to move through and hide in. Due to the selective harvest there will not be a significant restriction on subsistence uses.

Timber Resources

The forests of Southeast Alaska are primarily western hemlock and sitka spruce. The Forest Plan identifies lands that are suitable for timber production. Land that is suitable has the biological capability and availability to produce commercial wood products. The project areas are located in the timber production Land Use Designation. Applicable direction is contained in the Forest Plan Chapter 3 (Timber Production and Modified Landscape Land Use Designation) and Chapter 4 (Forest wide Standards and Guidelines).

Alternative 1 (No Action): Under this alternative no timber activities would occur.

Alternative 2 (Proposed Action): Between fifteen and forty-five percent of the timber would be harvested under this alternative. Trees will be left in clumps, corridors, and single trees to provide cover for wildlife, wind firm buffers, and travel access. These areas will be put into managed condition.

Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species

This project is located inland; therefore it should not have any effect on endangered marine mammals. The activities will occur along roads and canopy cover will not be drastically reduced, the marbled murrelet, a species proposed for listing would not be affected by this project. The silvicultural treatment is expected to reduce the time to develop stand structural characteristics preferred by goshawk for nesting and foraging. There is no trumpeter swan, osprey, or northern pike habitat near the proposed project area. No sensitive animal species would be impacted by this project. The 18 plant species listed as sensitive would not be impacted. Biological Evaluations can be found in the project file.

Visual

With the increase in tourism, there is a demand for scenic quality. Maintaining the scenic quality while allowing resource uses, which could alter the natural landscape, is of concern to many forest visitors.

Alternative 1 (No Action): This alternative will not change the visual quality of the areas.

Alternative 2 (Proposed Action): By utilizing individual tree selection this will reduce the visual effects of harvesting while leaving green trees standing. There will be no clearcutting and no road construction.

CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

The Forest Service consulted the following individuals, Federal, state and local agencies, tribes and non-Forest Service persons during the development of this environmental assessment:

ID TEAM MEMBERS:
Archeologist
Forestry Technician Timber
Forestry Technician Recreation/Lands & Mineral
Botanist
Fish Biologist
Biologist
Forester Timber

FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL AGENCIES:
Alaska Department of Fish & Game
Department of Commerce, NOAA
Department of Environmental Conservation
Department of Fish and Game
Department of Natural Resources
Department of Transportation & Public Facilities
Division of Governmental Coordination
Fish & Game Protection- Hoonah
US Fish & Wildlife Service
US Environmental Protection Agency

MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENTS:
City of Hoonah
City of Pelican
City of Tenakee Springs
Office of the Governor

PRIVATE ORGANIZATIONS and INDIVIDUALS:
Alaska Chapter Sierra Club
Alaska Chapter Wilderness Society
Alaska Forest Association
C.A.R.E.
Cascadia
Earth Justice
Forest Conservation Council
Friends of Southeast's Future
Gustavus Community Association
Hoonah Indian Association
Huna Totem Corporation
Ketchikan Gateway Borough
Klukwan, Inc.
Southeast Alaska Conservation Council
Sealaska Corporation
Sitka Conservation Society
Tongass Conservation Society
Whitestone Logging Inc.